

Emergency Watershed Protection



photos: NRCS Oklahoma

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides emergency restoration for eligible projects that relieve imminent threat to life and property due to impairments to the watershed through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program. To be eligible for the program, all projects must be sponsored by a political subdivision of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, or conservation district. The sponsor will bear up to 25 percent of the total construction cost in the form of cash or in-kind service. The Natural Resources Conservation Service will administer the contract through competitive bidding and pay for 75 percent of the total construction cost. The sponsor is responsible for all easements on private and public property, required permits through the Corp of Engineers (COE), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), and other required local permits.

Public and private landowners are eligible for this assistance, but must be represented by a sponsor. What triggers this assistance is a storm event that causes a threat

to life or property. A request for assistance from the sponsor must be submitted within 60 days of the event causing the disaster. Furthermore, all Emergency Watershed Protection projects must be economically and environmentally defensible and be sound from an engineering standpoint. Emergency Watershed Protection funds cannot be used to solve problems that existed before the disaster event or to pay for work already completed by the landowner.

On May 3, 1999, the costliest tornadoes in U.S. history occurred in Oklahoma. Seventy-four tornadoes crossed through 16 counties, with additional tornadoes occurring in Comanche, Cherokee, and LeFlore counties on May 30, 1999, June 1, 1999, and March 2000. This was in addition to flooding events on April 24 and June 30, 1999. Sixteen counties were presidential declarations with a total of 48 counties declared an emergency for Emergency Watershed Protection. A total of 149 damage survey reports were prepared with many covering the entire county for tornado damages.

These disasters caused 44 fatalities and injured 795 persons. A total of 3,137 homes were destroyed and a total of 4,866 homes were determined to be unlivable.

The total insured losses were reported to be \$1 billion dollars. More than one-third of the Oklahoma Natural Resources Conservation Service staff worked on the flooding- and tornado-related Emergency Watershed Protection restoration work.

The restoration work included debris removal and disposal to landfills or by burning and burial, stream bank stabilization, grass seeding, and tree planting. By December 2000, Natural Resources Conservation Service in Oklahoma had moved over 1 million cubic yards of debris in over 90 federal contracts. It is projected that by the end of January 2001, 1.5 million cubic yards of debris will be disposed of at a cost of \$15.1 million dollars.

Oklahoma Committed Over \$13.3 Million In EWP Program Funds In Fiscal Year 2000

- ☑ Stream bank restoration projects due to flooding in Lincoln, Oklahoma, Carter, Logan, Okmulgee, Tulsa, Creek, Kay, Kiowa, Blaine, and Alfalfa Counties totaled \$3 million.

- ☑ Debris removal due to the May 3, 1999, tornadoes continued into fiscal year 2000 covering Cleveland, Lincoln, Grady, Oklahoma, McClain, Canadian, Noble, Payne, Logan, Comanche, Cherokee, Pottawatomie, Kingfisher, and LeFlore Counties and totaled \$10.3 million.

- ☑ Dead bird disposal from the January 2000 snowstorms in McCurtain County totaled \$48,000.

For more information on this program or other USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office or check out our Webpage at www.ok.usda.gov



Blaine County Commissioner Louis Hood says, "NRCS and the local districts have been a major help in providing recommendations on numerous small projects as well as financial assistance on jobs such as this completed on Squaw Creek Bridge."



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